The perfect mole

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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Total Recall's home micro game translation is notorious for having a rockier development cycle than your average 'rags to riches' Sly Stallone boxing franchise. Originally intended to coincide with the movie's cinema release on 1st June 1990, it didn't emerge until the new year, just in time to provide an accompanying prelude to the VHS video release on 21st January, rather than staking its claim as another chart-storming Christmas no. 1 contender for Ocean.

Development was outsourced to Manchester-based studio, Active Minds, located five minutes walk from Ocean's own HQ. A concept proposal document was drafted by artist and designer, Paul Salmon, a schedule was set in motion and work commenced... in theory. According to Simon Butler, the reality was that the bulk of the team were putting their feet up and smoking dope while the creeping deadline drew ever closer.

To cut his long story short (see Games that Weren't article), the 8-bit versions looked like a lost cause until Simon brought the lack of progress to the attention of Ocean's software development director, Gary Bracey, and a rescue stratagem was formulated. Simon, Mark R Jones and the cream of Active Mind's non-stoned team were brought in-house to rush the project through to completion in record time. Version 1 of Total Recall for the Amstrad, Commodore 64 and Spectrum were scrapped, while the Amiga and Atari ST editions remained unaffected. Nevertheless, neither the 8 or 16-bit versions satisfied the first draft of the design

document, *or* Simon's subsequent rewrite. Odd then that the original Amiga coder saw his project through to completion, albeit with a little help from his friends as we'll see later.

To see if he could shed any light on the matter, I raised the contradiction with Mark, who "did all the graphics for the car chase sections", a contract for which he was paid £675, plus a bonus of £300 for his contribution to the Spectrum adaptation...

> "I don't recall (ha!) seeing any other working version of the Amiga or ST game. When I was at Active Minds all I saw was the Spectrum version that I was working on and the Commodore 64 version that Simon was working on. I didn't see anything of any 16-bit versions while there. Once we went in-house at Ocean obviously that released version was written very quickly. We went in-house at end of Oct/start of November and we were working on it right up to mid-December. The myth of it taking two weeks (TWOOOO WEEKS!) is a bit of an exaggeration I think. I remember it being at LEAST 6 weeks."
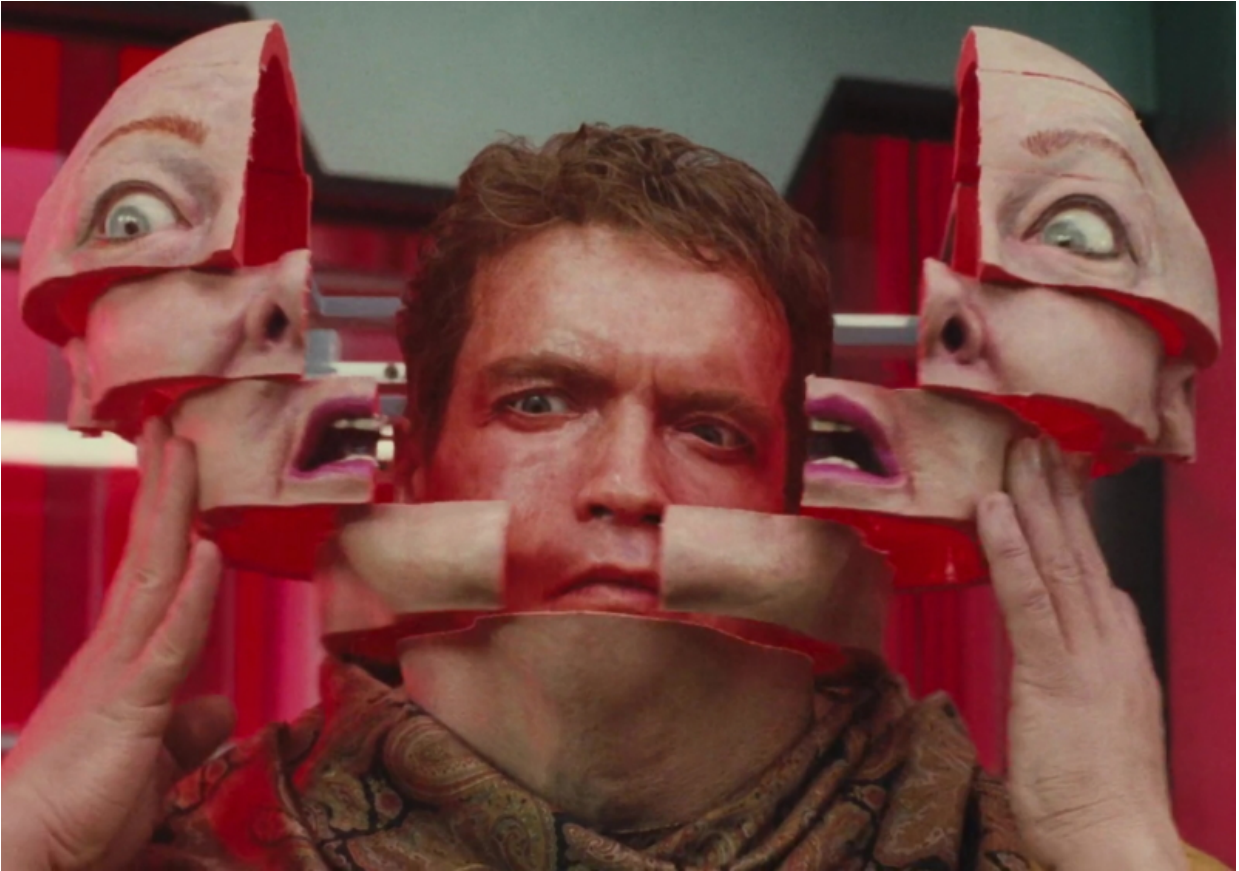
Mark's former colleague and close friend to this day, fellow graphics artist, Simon, kindly agreed to fill in any remaining blanks for me...

"To the best of my knowledge, the only version actually in development when I arrived at Active Minds WAS the Amiga version and it was a travesty. This is what started alarm bells ringing for me, among many other issues. But the appalling state of what was supposedly Ocean's big Christmas title was the main one.

I don't think it was down to the fact that Fred O' Rourke was a bad coder, if one looks at his LinkedIn profile he's still out there writing code so he can't be totally crap. But at that particular time it was either a case of being s**t or just not giving a flying f**k about the project. They seemed more interested in doing bugger all and getting

stoned than actively creating a winning product. I think he kept his job at Ocean because he wasn't totally s**t, although if I remember rightly he didn't last very long after Recall was finished. His LinkedIn profile certainly doesn't have Ocean down as one of his previous roles, so I doubt he's very proud of his accomplishments while there. And rightly so. He was a tool."

Barren ghosts of their potential future selves, the 8-bit versions still received some extremely positive scores, while 'mediocre' was the watchword where the 16-bit versions were concerned. Taking a few steps back, however, the game's inspiration was technically "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale"; a Philip K. Dick novella turned £65m budget, grim, sci-fi satire blockbuster directed by Paul Verhoeven and starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, though initially the leading role was intended to be embodied by a pudgy office drone thought to be ideal fodder for Richard Dreyfuss. Bet that did wonders for your ego, hey Richard? Later suggestions - as the movie's testosterone levels steadily escalated along with the special effects budget - included William Hurt and Patrick Swayze, which certainly sets the 'what-if?' daydream cogs in motion.

Plotwise, it revolves around Douglas Quaid (Quail in the book) who represents an everyman construction worker who spends his days breaking rocks in a quarry, and nights consumed by traumatic dreams of visiting Mars, meeting a mysteriously alluring lady and witnessing his own grotesque demise.

> Lori: No wonder you're having nightmares. You're always watching the news.

One day he decides he's owed some quality R&R time of the fantasy dream variety, so heads for the Rekall Inc. adventure holiday memory implantation clinic and not so coincidentally plumps for the 'secret agent on Mars' option rather than 'millionaire playboy', 'sports hero' or 'industrial tycoon'.
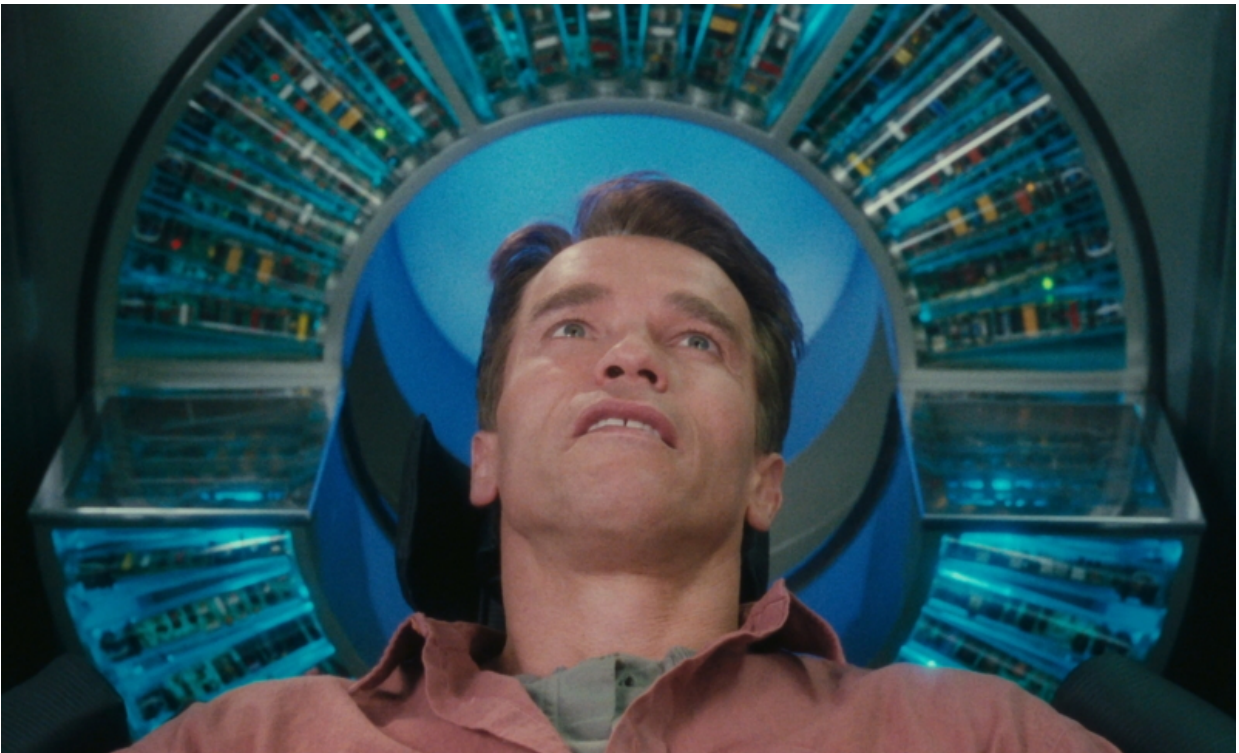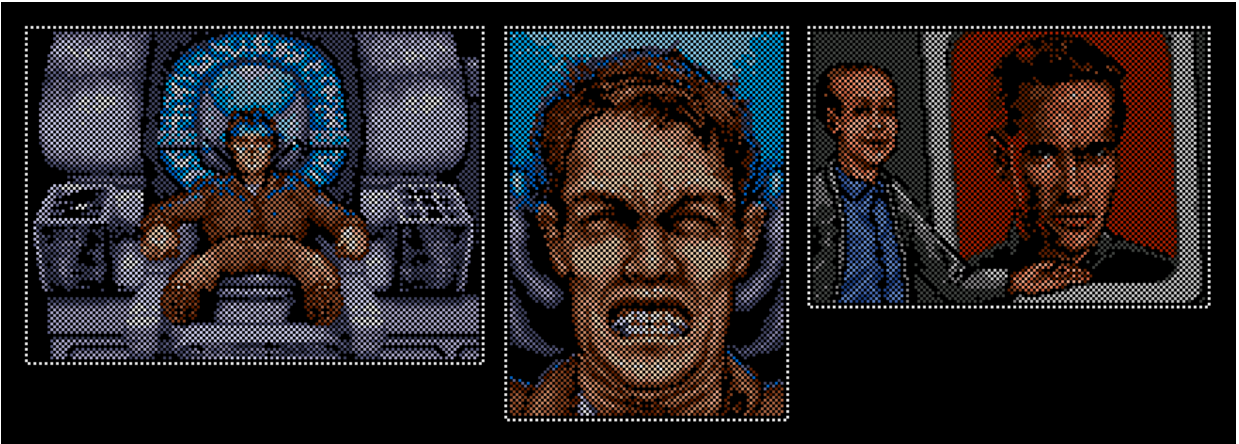
Douglas Quaid: Ever heard of Rekall? They sell those fake memories.

Harry: Oh, "Rekall, Rekall, Rekall." You thinking of going there?

Douglas Quaid: I don't know, maybe.

Harry: Well, don't. A friend of mine tried one their "special offers," nearly got himself lobotomized.

Douglas Quaid: No s**t?

Harry: Don't f**k with your brain, pal. It ain't worth it.

Douglas Quaid: I guess not.

(Continues jackhammering, Harry watches in disbelief)

Regrettably, the procedure goes boobies up (all three of them no doubt!) and Quaid's previously suppressed *genuine* memories of living precisely that existence begin flooding back. Reeling from pain and blind panic he's sedated and his memory of the experience is erased.
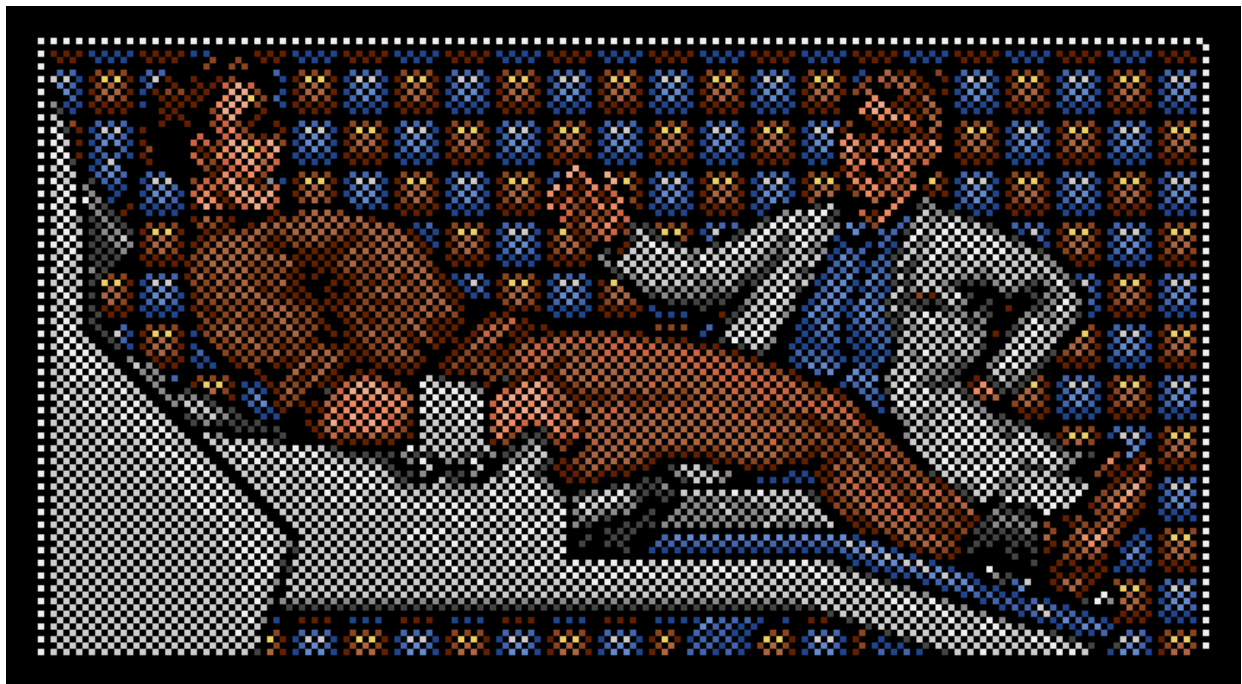
Vilos Cohaagen: What the f**k is going on down there?

Richter: I'm trying to neutralize a traitor, Sir.

Vilos Cohaagen: If I wanted him dead, you moron, I wouldn't have dumped him on Earth!

Richter: We can't let him run around. He knows too much.

Vilos Cohaagen: Lori says he can't remember jack s**t!

Richter: That's now. In an hour, he could have total recall.

Vilos Cohaagen: Listen to me, Richter, I want Quaid delivered alive for re-implantation. Have you got that? I want him back in place with Lori.

On returning home his day only gets worse; it turns out that Lori (Sharon Stone) who he thought was his wife isn't at all. In fact, she's the better half of rent-a-goon leader, Richter, who is operating under the auspices of governor of the red planet, Vilos Cohaagen (played by Ronny Cox). Their sham of a marriage was implanted in much the same way as Quaid's holiday that wasn't - a ruse that would allow Cohaagan's secret operative to monitor him.

Lori: Doug, honey... you wouldn't hurt me, would you, sweetheart? Sweetheart, be reasonable. After all, we're married!

(Lori goes for her gun, Quaid shoots her in the head, killing her)

Douglas Quaid: Consider that a divorce!

As if his pseudo-life wasn't convoluted enough, he comes into possession of a video player briefcase and super sleuth kit all rolled into one. Watching the instructional recording (of himself no less) he's informed that he's *not* himself at all, he's actually 'Hauser', a secret agent who formerly worked for Cohaagan. As the plot thickens we discover that he wiped his own memory to protect himself having learned of the whereabouts of an alien artefact sought by his boss.

Douglas Quaid: If I am not me, then who the hell am I?

Kuato: What do you want, Mr. Quaid?

Douglas Quaid: The same as you; to remember.

Kuato: But why?

Douglas Quaid: To be myself again.

Kuato: You are what you do. A man is defined by his actions, not his memory.

Except naturally, that's all cobblers because who doesn't love a well-scripted plot twist? What Hauser has done is set up his alter ego to unsuspectingly lead Cohaagan to the leader of the rebel resistance, allowing him to crush any opposition to his oxygen-hogging tyranny. At which point he plans to spring out of the woodwork, re-implant Hauser's dodgy spy persona and pat himself on the back for pulling off the mother of all bait and switch subterfuge gambits.

For Quaid to make sense of his predicament he must first remove the tracking beacon from his head using what looks like some kind of medieval torture device, and voyage to Mars to seek support and refuse from the rebel opposition. Cue level one of the game. You thought I'd forgotten about that didn't you?

Your goal here is to gather together the fake Brubaker ID, disguise, briefcase, tracker removal device and ticket to Mars, en route from your hotel room across town to a phone box where you await further guidance. Richter and his pliable henchmen have other ideas and so pull out all the stops to stymy your plans.
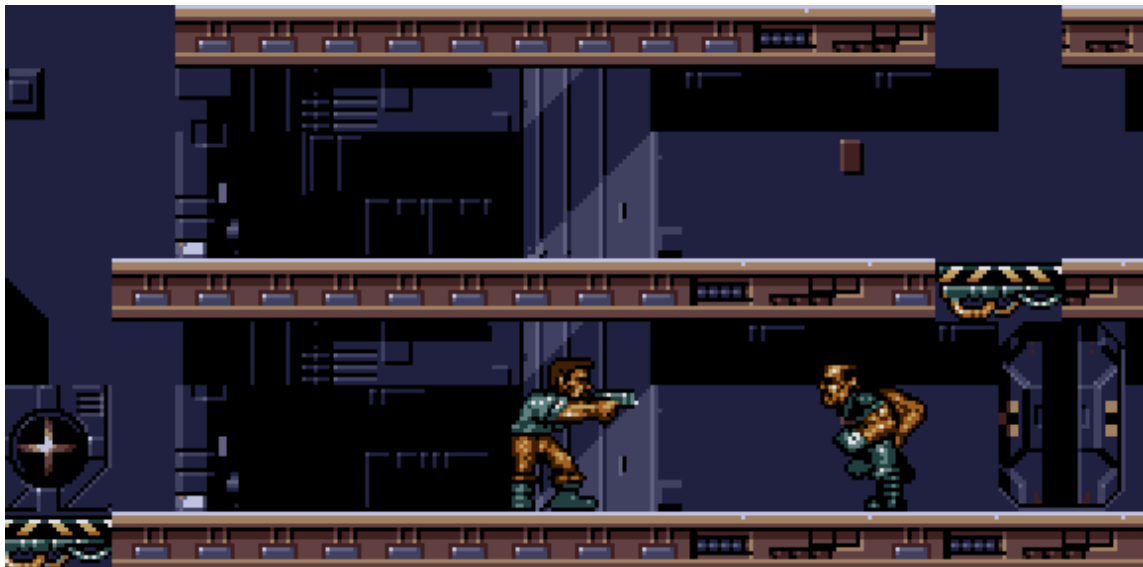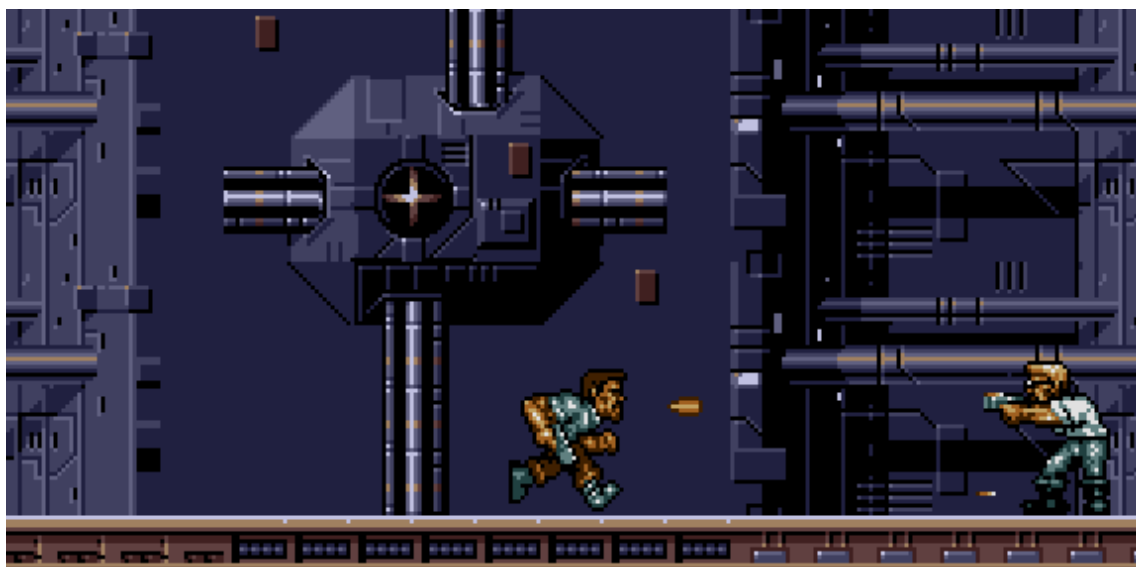
Well, actually that would be over-egging the pudding... with piffle and tommyrot and twaddle and flimflam. You get the idea; the enemy's artificial 'intelligence' is pretty dire, so the most pressing challenge is managing your limited ammo supplies. As such you'd be best advised to avoid confrontation with enemies as much as possible, even if this makes you look like a yellow-bellied Great Dane. Assuming they are unarmed and engagement is absolutely necessary, it would be wise to instead use your fists to dispatch them. Alternatively, duck and stay there; you become instantly invisible whenever you duck.
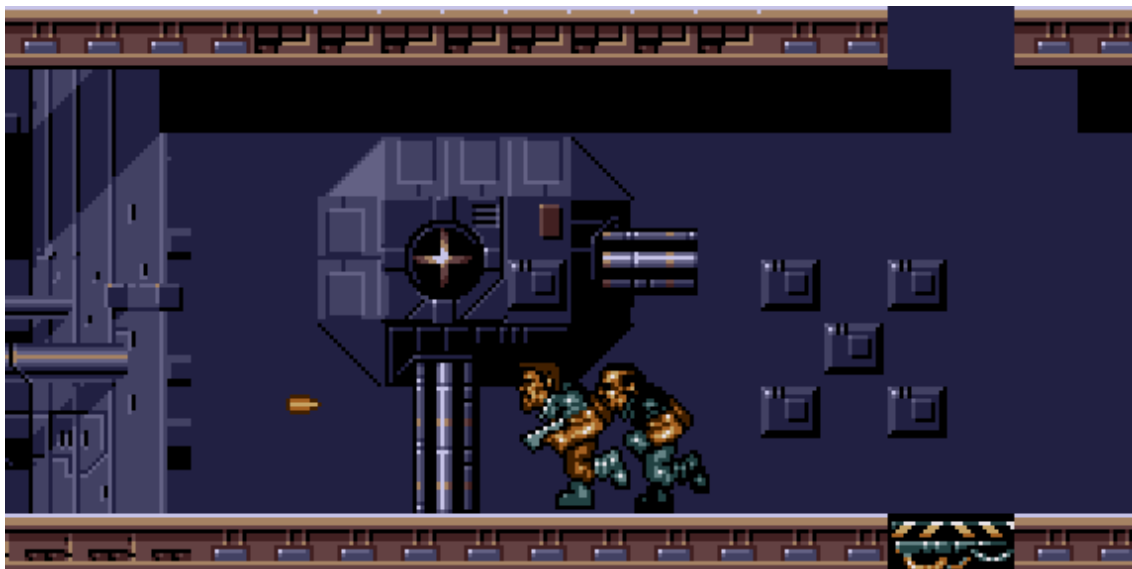
Baddies tend to do their own thing, completely oblivious of your presence, even when you're actually touching them! They remind me of the kind of zombies that can only detect their human prey by olfaction - if you mask your scent (often with the stench of death) it's possible to walk through the blind numpties without enduring so much as a scratch... in movies such as 'The Girl with All the Gifts' for a recent example I mean, not here, before you start scouring the instruction manual for the relevant hotkey. When they're not lolloping straight into gaping holes, they remain catatonic, shooting mechanically into the ether, while others run away from you absorbing hits in the back without returning fire.
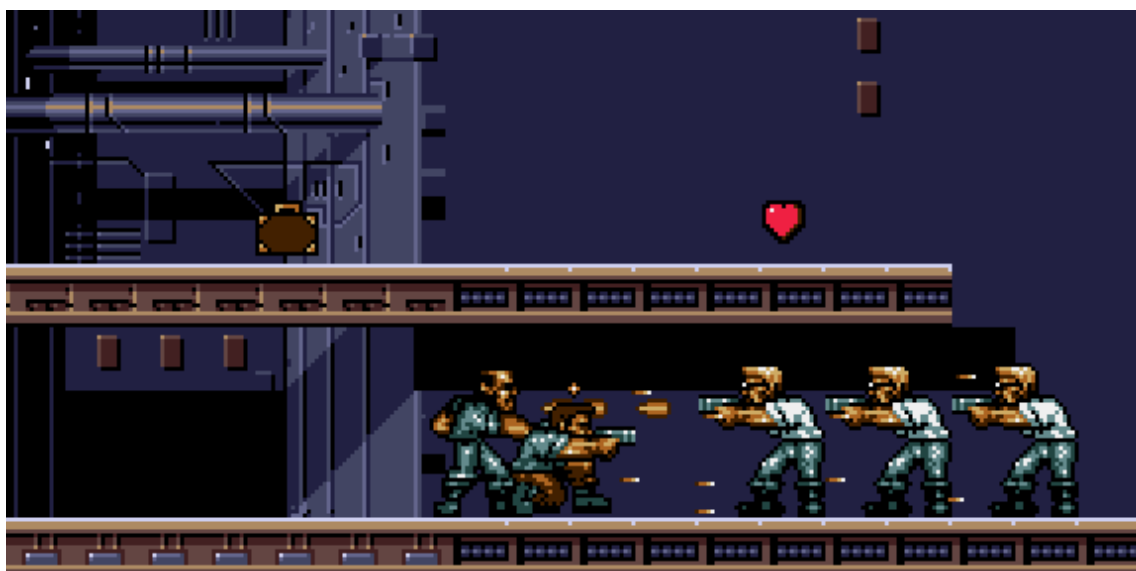
You'd hope the ones in the movie would be a modicum more menacing - all the Martian guards were played by real-life, gen-u-ine American marines and naval officers.

If it sounds like I'm being too harsh, keep in mind that this is the Amiga version under scrutiny; the one that had been in development ever since Gary Bracey received the Total Recall photos and press materials from Carolco Licensing on 23rd April 1990 having signed a non-disclosure agreement that would prevent him from unveiling them to the public until the movie studio was ready to do so themselves.

Eight feet tall, built like the Incredible Hulk with a penchant for cracking cheesy one-liners, you say? Nope, doesn't ring any bells.

Helpfully a swivelling on-screen arrow points you in the direction in which you need to travel to locate the next item, yet still you must establish for yourself the correct non-linear route to arrive at your destination. If the journey leaves you feeling a bit haggard, hearts can be collected to boost your flagging health.

Level 2 represents the first of the 2D, side-view driving stages. Hijacking a 'Johnnycab' (the Thunderbirds style puppet-controlled taxi from the movie) you floor the accelerator in search of a derelict warehouse (the old cement factory in the movie) where you can watch the video briefing and remove the beacon through your nose in private seeing as that wet towel won't muffle the signal forever (yeah I know, Hollywood science). Police commander, Richter, and his cronies are supposedly on your tail, though it's *you* who speeds past an endless cavalcade of vehicles terrorising them with your erratic driving.

Representing progress in the level, a mini-cab chugs along the bottom of the screen.
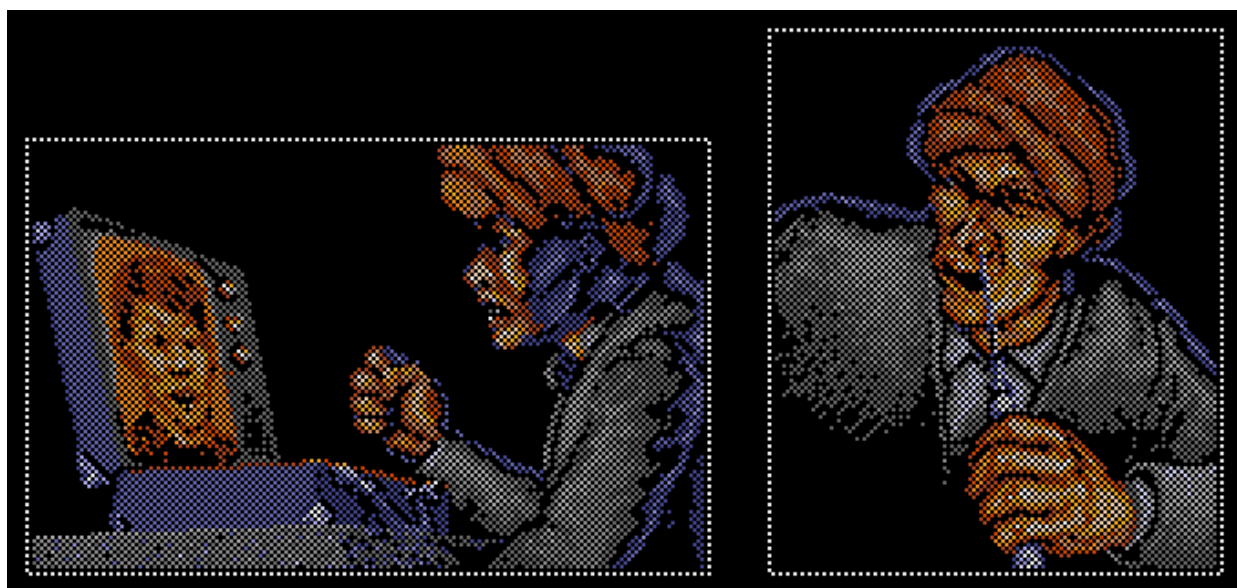
Hauser: Howdy, stranger! This is Hauser. If things have gone wrong, I'm talking to myself and you don't have a wet towel around your head. Now, whatever your name

is, get ready for the big surprise. You are not you, you're me.

Douglas Quaid: (to himself) No s**t.

Hauser: All my life, I worked for Mars Intelligence, I did Cohaagen's dirty work. But then I met someone, a woman. She taught me a few things, like I was playing for the wrong team. All I can do now is make up for it. You see...

(Points to his head)

Hauser: ...there's enough s**t in here to f**k Cohaagen good. But if you're hearing this, it means is that he's got to me first. Now, here comes the hard part, old buddy. Now it is all up to you.

Douglas Quaid: (displeased) Great...

Hauser: Now, let's start by getting that bug out of your head.

(shows the nose device)

Hauser: Take this out of the case, and stick it up your nose. Don't worry, it's self-guiding. Just shove real hard.

(Quaid takes a deep breath, and sticks the nose device up his nose)

Hauser: When you hear a crunch, you're there. Now, pull it out. Be careful! That's my head, too.

(Quaid screams in pain while Hauser grins, then Quaid pulls out the bug)

Hauser: This is the plan. Get your ass to Mars, and go to the Hilton Hotel and flash the fake Brubaker I.D. at the front desk, that's all there is to it. Just do as I tell you. You can nail that son of a bitch that f**ked you and me. I'm counting on you, old buddy. Don't let me down!

Armed with rocket launchers (standard issue with most mini-cabs these days) you can clear the way by blasting other taxis, trucks and tanks off the road while you swerve around oil spills and hoover up useful collectables such as health bonuses. Upon the stage's denouement you go head to head with a mega-tank that repeatedly swerves in a circular motion as it reverses with its ballistics set to auto-fire (a

carbon copy of your own weapon). It can effortlessly be hit and destroyed while enemy fire sails by without impact if you ride the lower of the white broken road markings. Do so and a comically chipper "hope you enjoyed the ride" snippet of sampled speech snagged straight from the movie kicks in, which I thought was a nice touch.

Driving stages initially adopted an overhead GTA style design, though were rewritten by Bobby Earl at the 11th hour to allow Fred O' Rourke to make headway with the platforming elements. Gameplay-wise it just wasn't working out, and having seen how the Batmobile had been implemented in the Mega Drive title, 'Batman: The Video Game' by Sun Electronics Corp., this was seen as a safer bet.

We return to platforming action for the third stage in which we reach the warehouse, have a revelatory heart to heart with our previous self and plod on in search of the spaceport that will propel us to Mars.
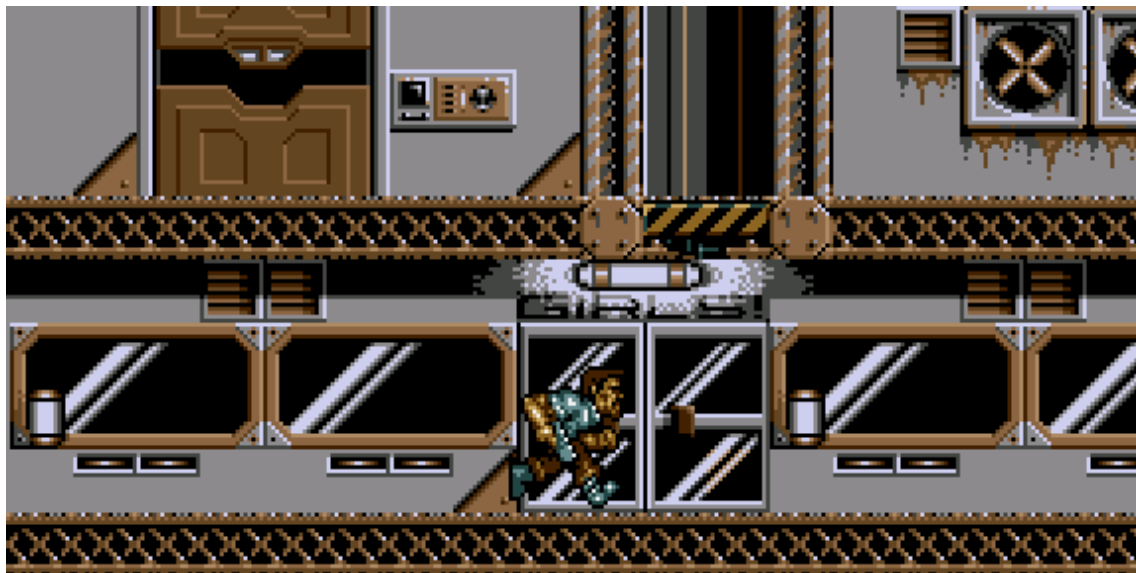
Venusville - the colony's red-light district - is the setting for level four, where, in the movie we meet a community of Martians mutated by radiation poisoning. Of course, Richter is up to his old tricks again, yet strangely his drones thin out as we progress through the game creating a topsy-turvy difficulty curve of sorts.

Level five sees us hitting the tarmac once again as we enter the crimson-hued Martian caverns in a new set of wheels where we encounter a duplicitous taxi driver called Benny, and the 'demure' Melina, the lady from our dreams. With Benny's 'help' our goal is to escape the foreboding enclosure, dodge the screwdriver excavation vehicles and locate the rebel base.
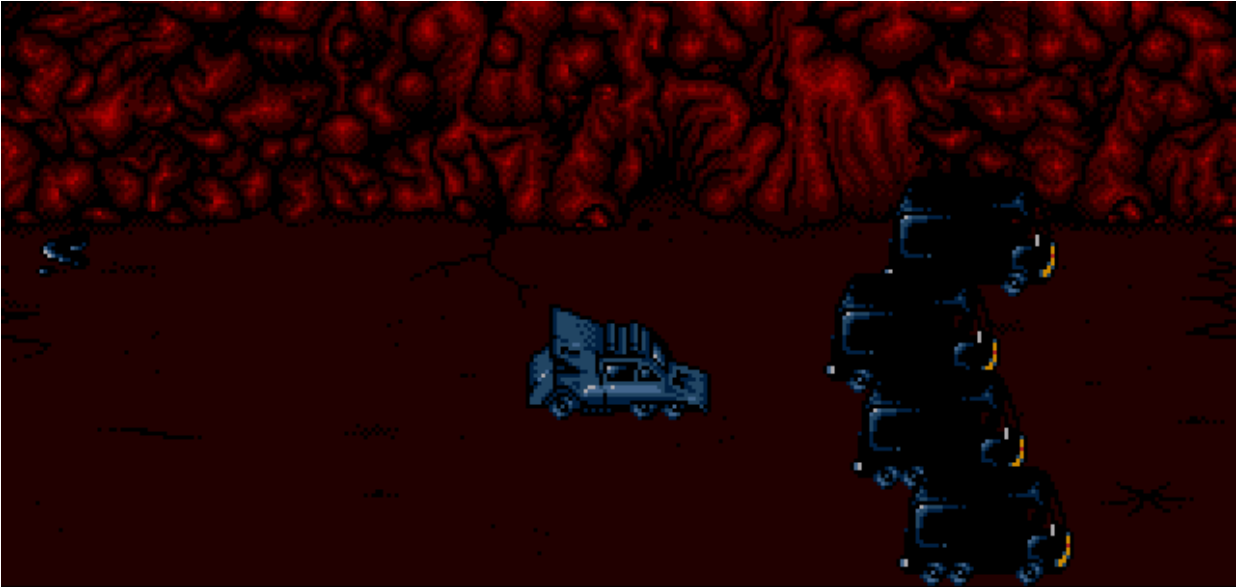
If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire the AAAA-Team... always first in the phone book!

Those of you who have seen the movie will know time is of the essence because Cohaagen is about to shut down the ventilation system asphyxiating its citizens. The big bad guardian boss capping off this stage is a mega-screwdriver, which has clearly been to the same dance school as the mega-tank because it knows exactly the same steps! Hmm, a simple sprite swap methinks. There are no white lines to follow in this stage, yet if you position yourself where the lower set would be, you can defeat the feeble tunnelling tool without breaking into a sweat.
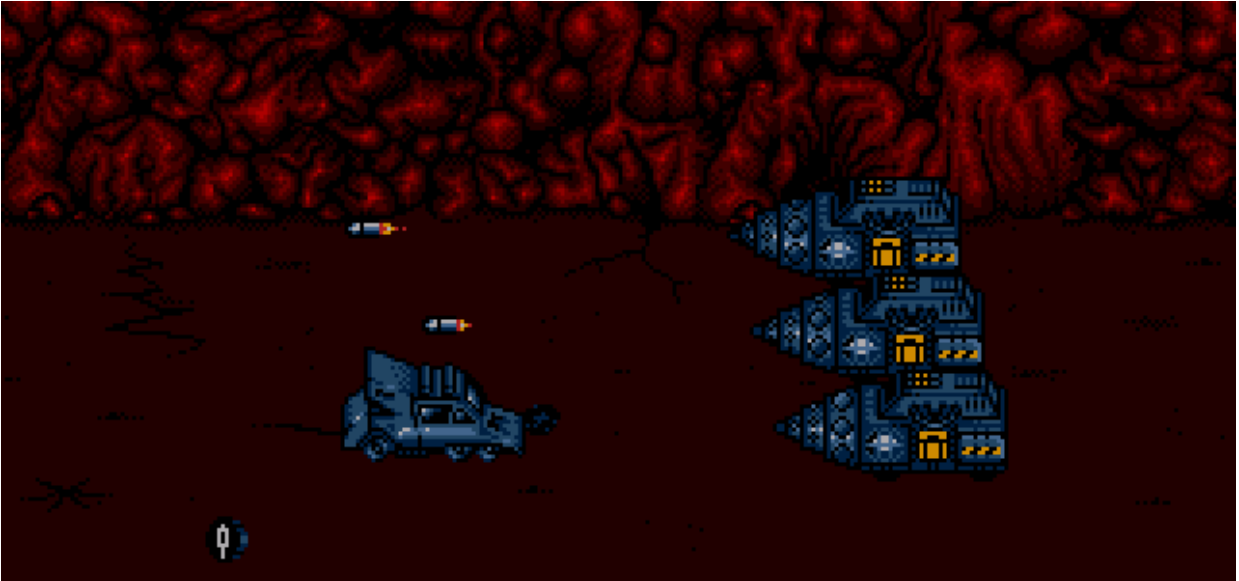
Who are you calling a warm-up act?
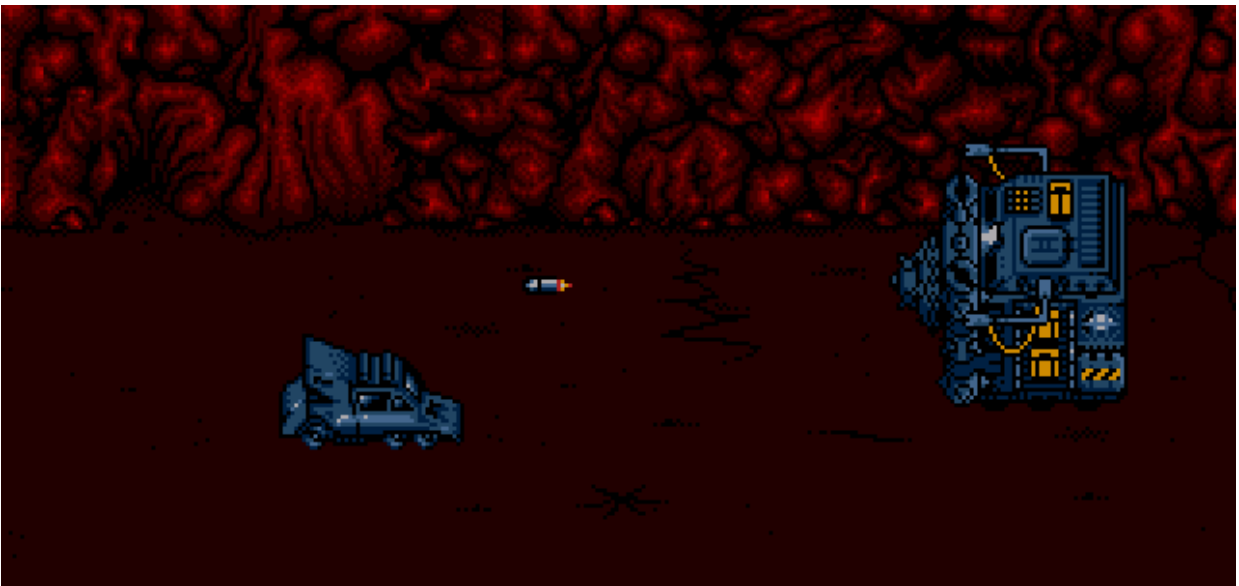
For the final stage we're back on foot, activating icon-controlled lifts and toggling switches to open doors in an effort to track down Kuato (a hideous, telepathic, parasitic conjoined twin that protrudes from his brother's stomach).

As well as reading our mind to discover the secret of the pyramid mine, the rebel leader will provide the key to the computer control room guarding passage to the alien reactor (one and the same thing as it happens). You may be interested to learn that Kuato, as well as the Martian community, were the brainchild of the original director, David Cronenberg; his parting gift before jumping ship to work on The Fly owing to 'artistic differences' amongst the production team.
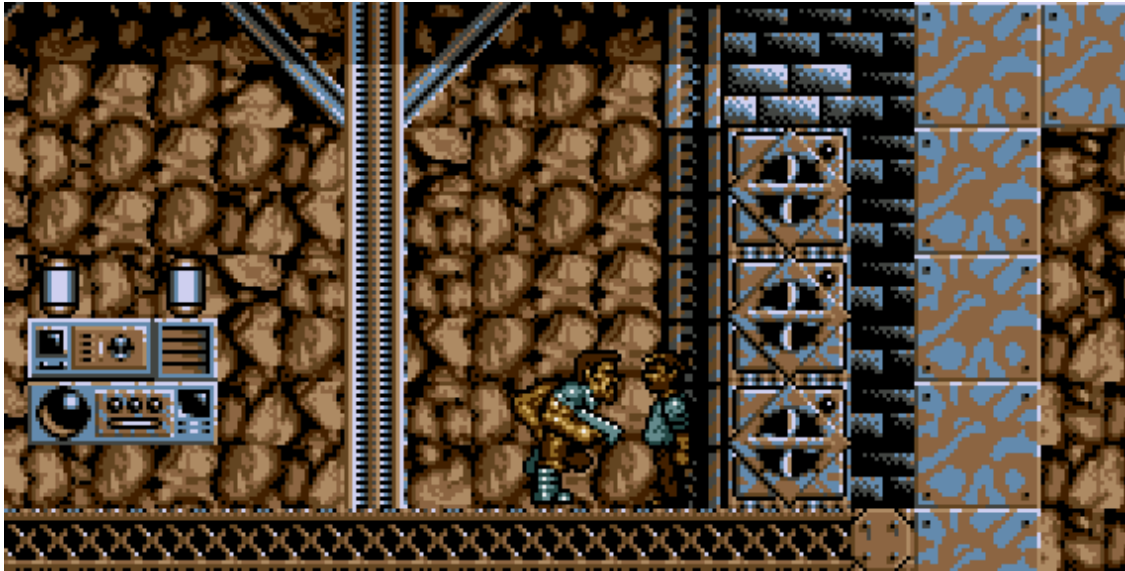
Behind every great paunch lurks a great mutant? Isn't that how the saying goes?

All my Boglins came in cages. This must be a special edition.

Vilos Cohaagen: (after Cohaagen's team kills Kuato) So this is the great man. Hmph. No wonder he kept out of sight. Well, my friend...

(puts his hands on Quaid's shoulders)

Vilos Cohaagen: ...you're a hero.

Douglas Quaid: F**k you!

Vilos Cohaagen: Don't be modest. Kuato is dead. The resistance has been completely wiped out and you were the key to the whole thing.

Douglas Quaid: (to Melina) He's lying.

Melina: (to Quaid) You two-faced bastard!

Vilos Cohaagen: You can't blame him, princess.

(His finger grazes Melina's face)

Vilos Cohaagen: He's innocent. You see, Quaid, none of my people could get close to Kuato. F**kin' mutants could always sniff us out. So Hauser and I sat down and invented you: the perfect mole.

Douglas Quaid: You know you're lying. Hauser turned against you.

Vilos Cohaagen: Uh-uh. That's what we wanted you to think. Fact is, Hauser volunteered to become "Doug Quaid." It was the only way to fool the psychics.

Douglas Quaid: Get your story straight.

(Points to Richter)

Douglas Quaid: This idiot has been trying to kill me ever since I went to Rekall. You don't kill someone you're trying to plant.

Vilos Cohaagen: He wasn't in on it. You set him off by going to Rekall.

Douglas Quaid: So, why I am still alive?

Vilos Cohaagen: We gave you lots of help.

(points to Benny)

Vilos Cohaagen: Benny here...

Benny: (to Quaid) My pleasure, man.

Vilos Cohaagen: The guy with the suitcase, the mask, the money, the message from Hauser. All of that was set up by us.

Douglas Quaid: Sorry. Too perfect.

Vilos Cohaagen: Perfect, my ass! You pop your memory cap before we can activate you. Richter goes hog-wild screwing up everything that I spent a year planning. Frankly... I'm amazed it worked!

Douglas Quaid: Well, Cohaagen. I've got to hand it to you. It's the best mind-f**k yet.

Rearrange the four symbols in the correct order and access is granted allowing you to enter the lift shaft, nudge Richter over the edge as it ascends and proceed to the final confrontation with Cohaagan. If you can thwart his plans to blow up the turbinium reactor it can be used to generate a hospitable atmosphere, thereby quashing Cohaagan's villainous oxygen supply monopoly and emancipating the downtrodden populace.
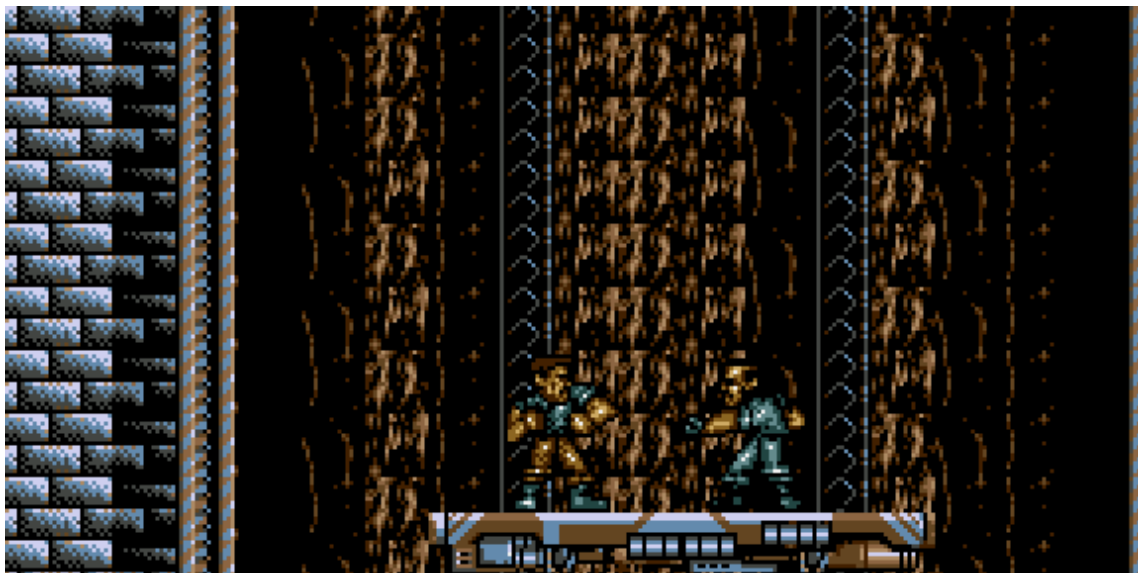
"See you at the party, Richter!"

Technician: Sir, the oxygen level is bottoming out in Sector G. What do you want me to do about it?

Vilos Cohaagen: (as if obvious) Don't do anything.

Technician: But they won't last an hour, sir.

Vilos Cohaagen: F**k 'em. It'll be a good lesson to the others.

Vilos Cohaagen: Don't touch that! Get away! Get back!

Douglas Quaid: What are you afraid of? Turn it on.

Vilos Cohaagen: Impossible! Once the reaction starts, it'll spread to all the turbinium in the planet. Mars will go into global meltdown. That's why the aliens never turned it on.

Douglas Quaid: And you expect me to believe you?

Vilos Cohaagen: Who gives a s**t what you believe? In thirty seconds you'll be dead, and I'll blow this place up and be home in time for Corn Flakes.

(Shoots several inches near Quaid)

Vilos Cohaagen: I didn't want it to end this way, I wanted Hauser back, but no, you had to be Quaid!

Douglas Quaid: I am Quaid!

Vilos Cohaagen: You're nothing! You're nobody! You're a stupid dream! Well, all dreams come to an end.

Having only landed a single blow to your adversary's noggin, simultaneously the two of you are abruptly swept out into the Martian atmosphere where you'll have to master the fine art of anaerobic respiration if you are to survive. The cutscene

fails to explain how Cohaagan is sent to meet his maker, while Quaid is able to sidestep the inconvenience of dying a ghastly head-popping death.
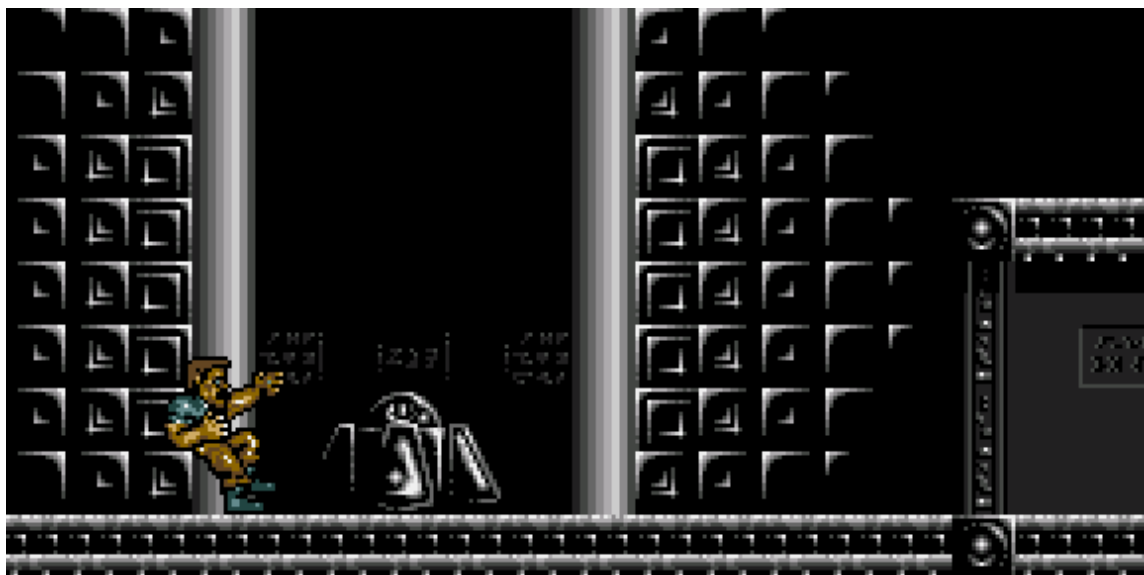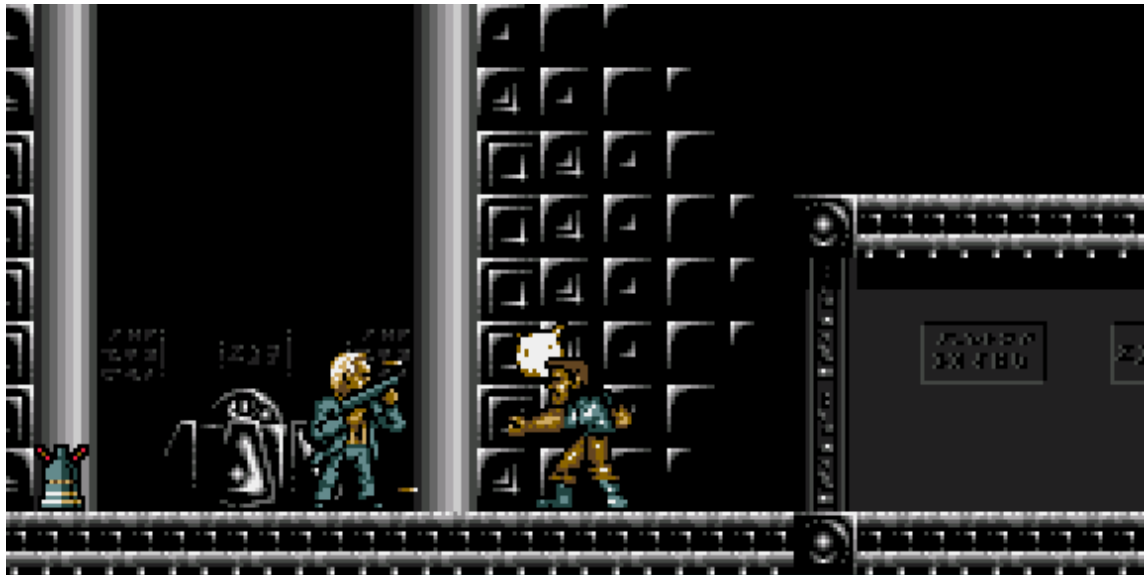
At this juncture in the silver screen iteration, Cohaagan is able to detonate his explosive rig sucking him out of the space station and into the unknown by the full force of depressurisation. His fragile head clearly isn't compatible with extreme solar radiation or the undomed Mars atmosphere and so unceremoniously bursts before the life-saving alien artefact can kick into action. Luckily Quaid is able to hang on long enough to activate the reactor before himself and Melina are doomed to share his gruesome fate, and everyone lives happily ever after.

Not bad for half an hour's toil - about the length of time it takes a competent player to finish the game judging by the longplays found on YouTube. It would have been worth the agro too had it not all been a minor sabbatical from sanity. Or was it?

Melina: I can't believe it, it's like a dream. What's wrong?

Douglas Quaid: I just had a terrible thought... what if this is a dream?

Melina: Well, then, kiss me quick before you wake up!
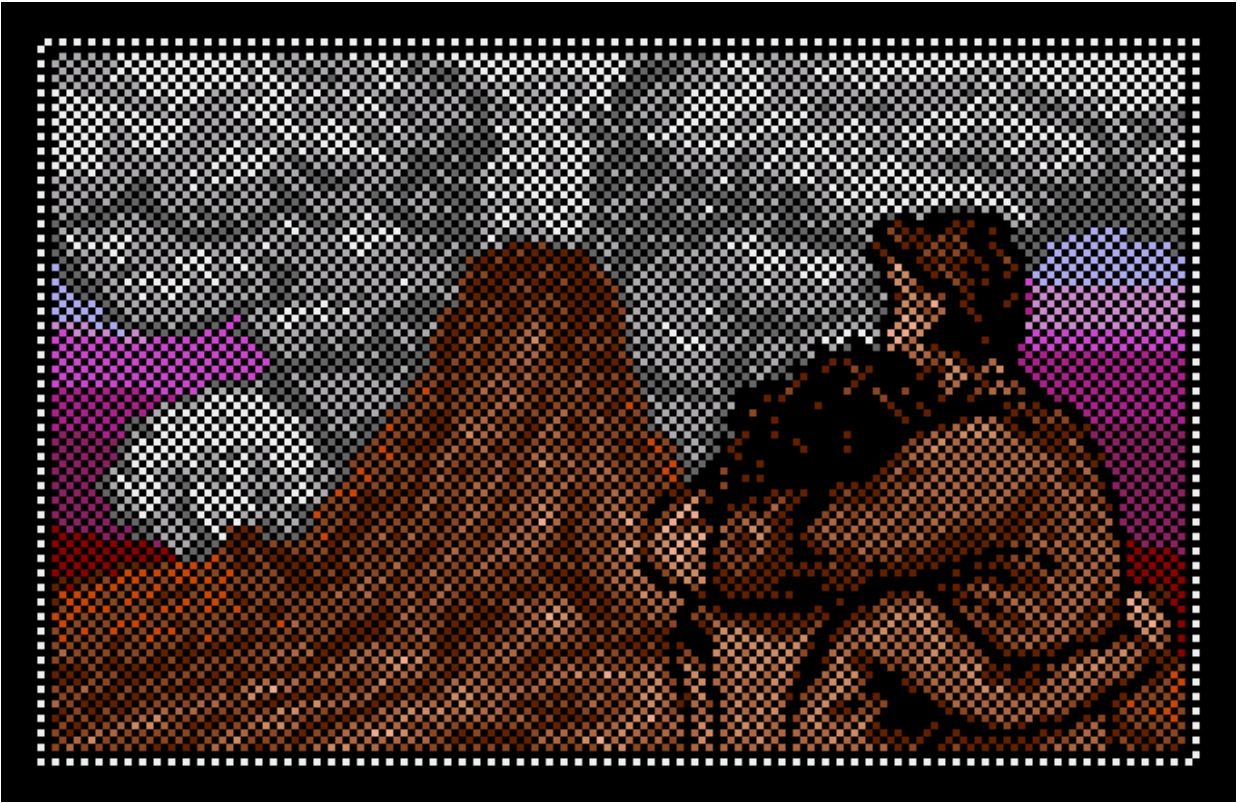
Maybe the answer is revealed in the almost-sequel based on another Philip K. Dick short story you may have heard of, 'The Minority Report', which instead became a Steven Spielberg blockbuster by the same name in 2002. Or maybe just check out the Mandatory.com article by William Bibbiani instead. You know, there's a reason *some* things are left unsaid.

So that was the game that *was*. What about the coulda-woulda-shoulda pipedream that *wasn't*?

Originally the developers intended to include a selection of 'semi-independent multiples' to serve as backup to Arnie,

while the adaptation we got only featured a couple of sprite-swapping sequences involving Melina, who was operated independently rather than simultaneously, and a mirror image holographic projection of Arnie who fights our corner without the real Arnie taking any damage. The plan was to give players the option to unleash supporting cast members such as Benny and Lori in addition to Melina onto other floors to even up the odds, clear the path, collect objects and then return to Arnie to be taken under his wing. As in the movie they would have been mobilised via the holographic bracelet gadget, much like the diluted AI Arnie we see in the final game.
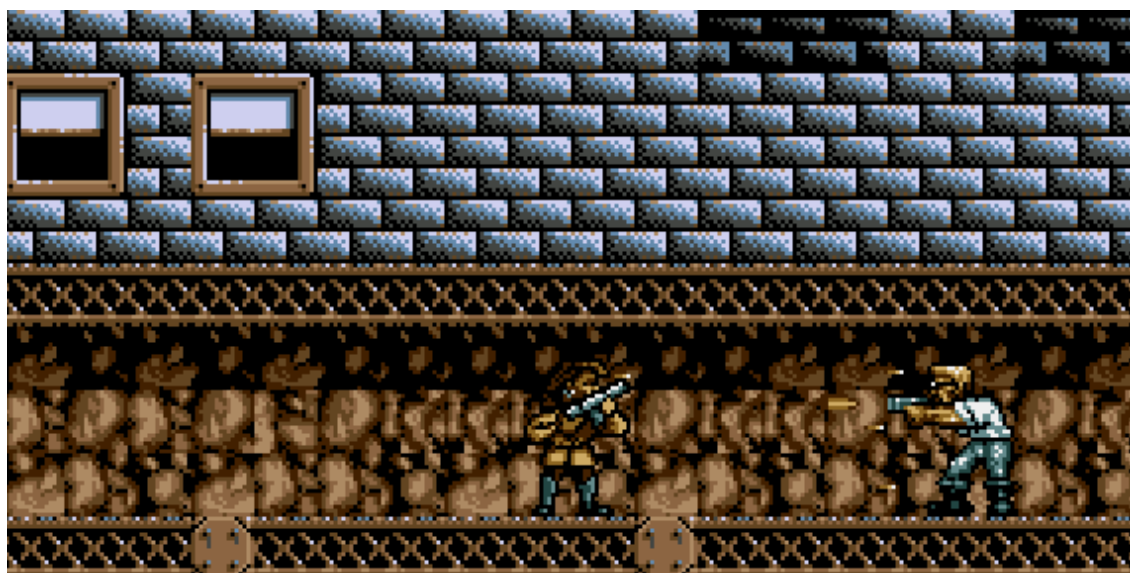
During the early stages of development Total Recall was expected to be a much longer game, therefore it was considered important to implement a save/load feature.

Before progressing to the main game you'd have to earn cash (or 'credits' if we're to use the movie terminology for currency) by excavating rocks from your quarry workplace to pay for your holiday memory implantation. Ramping up the challenge, falling rocks and heavy machinery would pose a threat to your success and thus have to be avoided. Reach

Rekall Inc. with insufficient funds and you'd be offered a booby prize rather than a trip to Mars. A postcard depicting Hawaii, the moon or Mars (minus the secret agent adjunct) would be presented along with a game over message forcing you to try again.

'Shockway Rider' by Faster Than Light was to be the inspirational basis for a side-scrolling footpath-roaming stage where the goal would be to get to the Rekall office whilst fending off attack from enemy hordes and common or garden thieves along the way. Being robbed would impel you into a side street leading to a subway train back to the quarry where you'd have to revert to earning enough moolah to fund your trip. Especially controversial at the time of release, the futuristic 1987 8-bit game features decapitation, Mad Max-style violence and even granny GBH! Analogously, Total Recall was criticised for its excessively visceral portrayal of

violence, and that's *after* it was edited to be reconsidered for an 'R' rating in the US; initially it was to have been '*X*' rated.
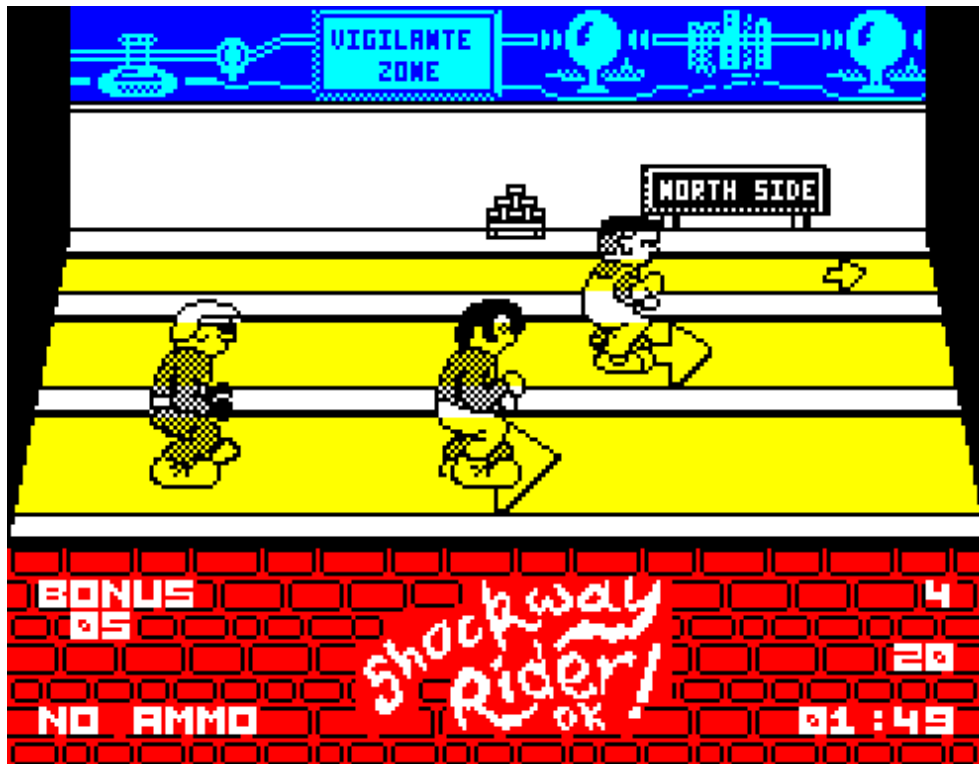
"The inclusion of these sections will change the pace of the main game, keeping interest alive after a long period of play. The player will doubtless be looking forward to coming to this part of the game once he has played it a couple of times, the reviewers will love it!"

Introducing train travel would have been especially relevant as a memorable high-velocity chase scene in the movie depicts Quaid utilising Mexico's real-life public transportation system (following a splash of silver paint) to evade Richter's yes-men. Because the genuine article naturally looked so futuristic, evoking the desired period (2084) required only minimal remodelling.

One of the platforming stage settings was envisioned to manifest as a cityscape in which you'd have the option to exploit vehicles in order to take shortcuts, though the

benefits would inevitably be offset by missing out on certain power-ups.

Dr Edgemar's scene where he tries in vain to convince Quaid he has suffered from a "schizoid embolism" as a result of his implant and risks succumbing to insanity and being lobotomised if he doesn't take an awakening pill was to incorporate selectable dialogue options. Accepting the pill was tantamount to suicide, triggering a commiseratory game over message, and the erasure of all your save games (of course in the movie you kill the doctor and escape with rebel Melina). Ouch! That's mean. Interactive dialogue would elucidate the plot rather than the static screens seen in the released version.

> Dr. Edgemar: You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. - Been there, done that, got the t-shirt!
>
> --
>
> Quaid points a gun at Dr. Edgemar's head.
>
> Douglas Quaid: All right, let's say you're telling the truth and this is all a dream. I could pull this trigger and it won't matter.
>
> Dr. Edgemar: It won't make the slightest difference to me Doug, but the consequences to you will be devastating. In your mind, I'll be dead, and with no one to guide you out, you'll be stuck here in permanent psychosis. The walls of reality will come crashing down around you. One minute, you're the savior of the rebel cause; next thing you know, you'll be Cohaagen's bosom buddy. You'll even have fantasies about alien civilizations as you requested;

During the interview sequence in Cohaagan's office our view of the action was to draw back from the screen revealing that the game is taking place inside the monitor on his desk. Watching events unfold over the shoulder of your nemesis, Arnie would enter the room duplicating the animations witnessed on the monitor.

Finally, we almost had a range of self-defence manoeuvres to be activated by pulling back on the joystick, whereas all that came to fruition was a standard duck mechanic. No, nothing like Donk, he was a samurai. You know what I mean. Stop being obtuse.
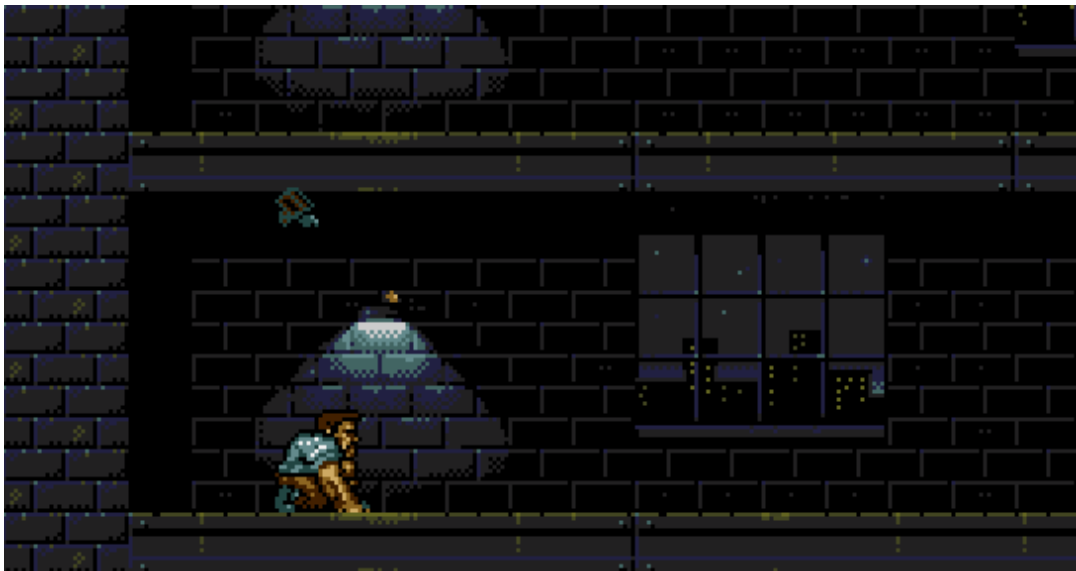
*The movie features several classic wise quacks. This article doesn't.*

Realising much of the schematics were ill-conceived and disjointed, Simon sought approval to revamp the initial design document and was granted permission to do so in July 1990.

He removed the 'jackhammer' initiation ritual assuming it would amount to little more than a joystick wiggling affair a la Daley Thompson's Decathlon.
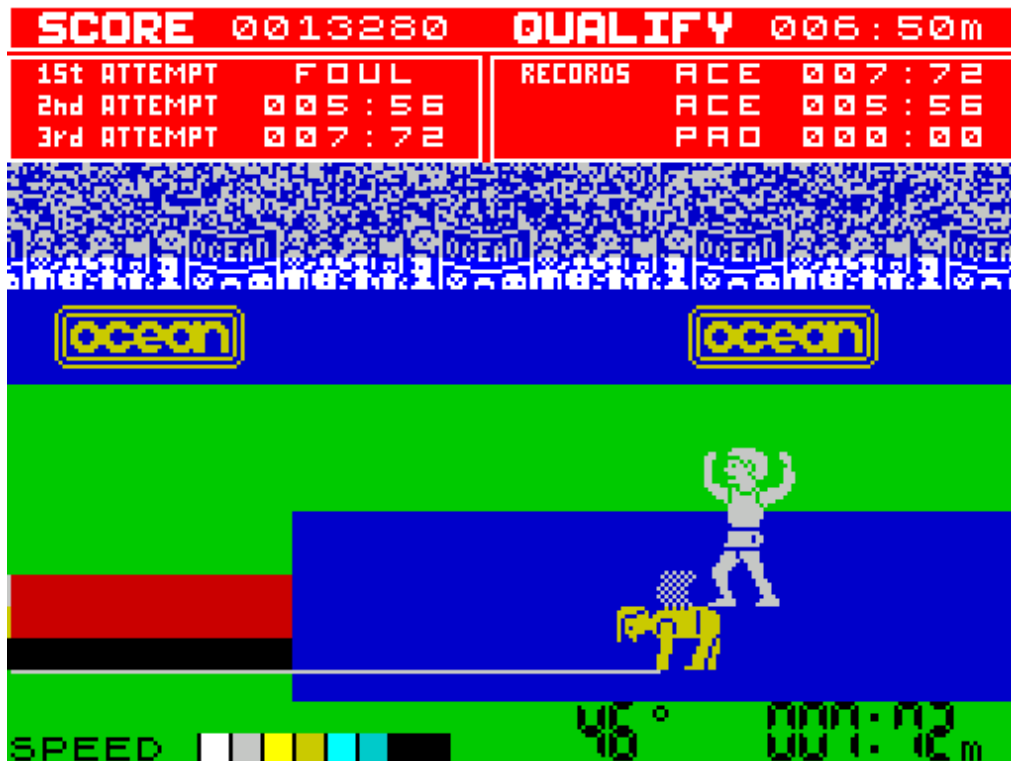
In a rare moment, Simon reveals he knows where to draw the line! ;)

Gritty (as opposed to cartoony) comic book panes in a Cinemaware style were inserted constituting cut scenes to stitch together the plot and disparate stages, whilst also delineating the divisions between levels. One could draw parallels between the pop art techniques of Roy Lichtenstein and those found here, though the comic book aesthetic was principally emblematic of the 1930s and so pre-dates his work by several decades.
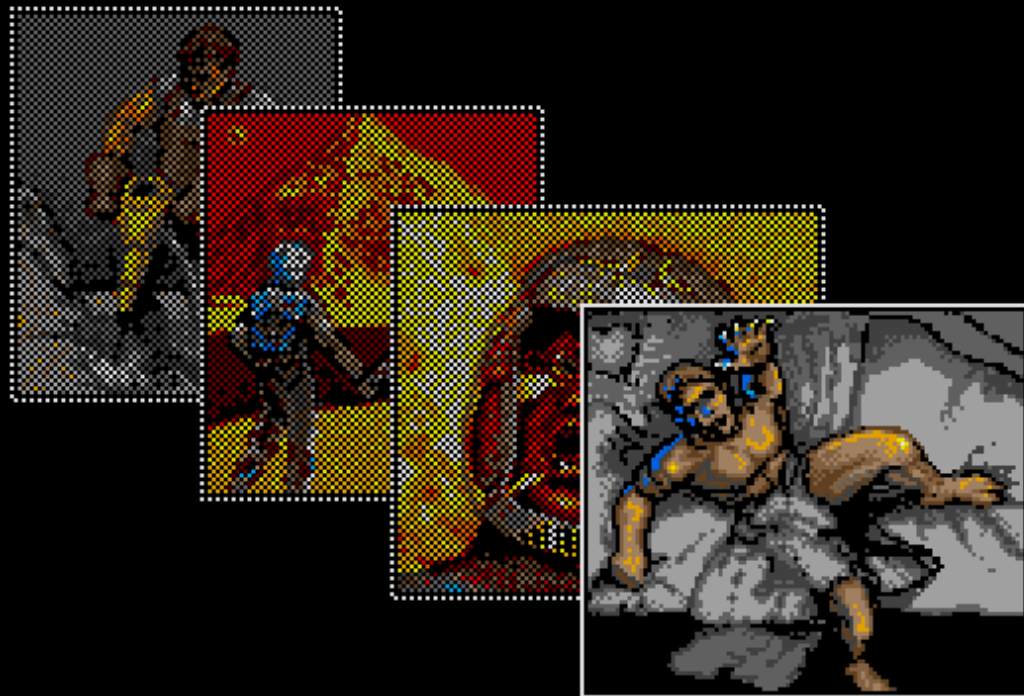
WHAT DO THEY MEAN? WHO CAN HELP?
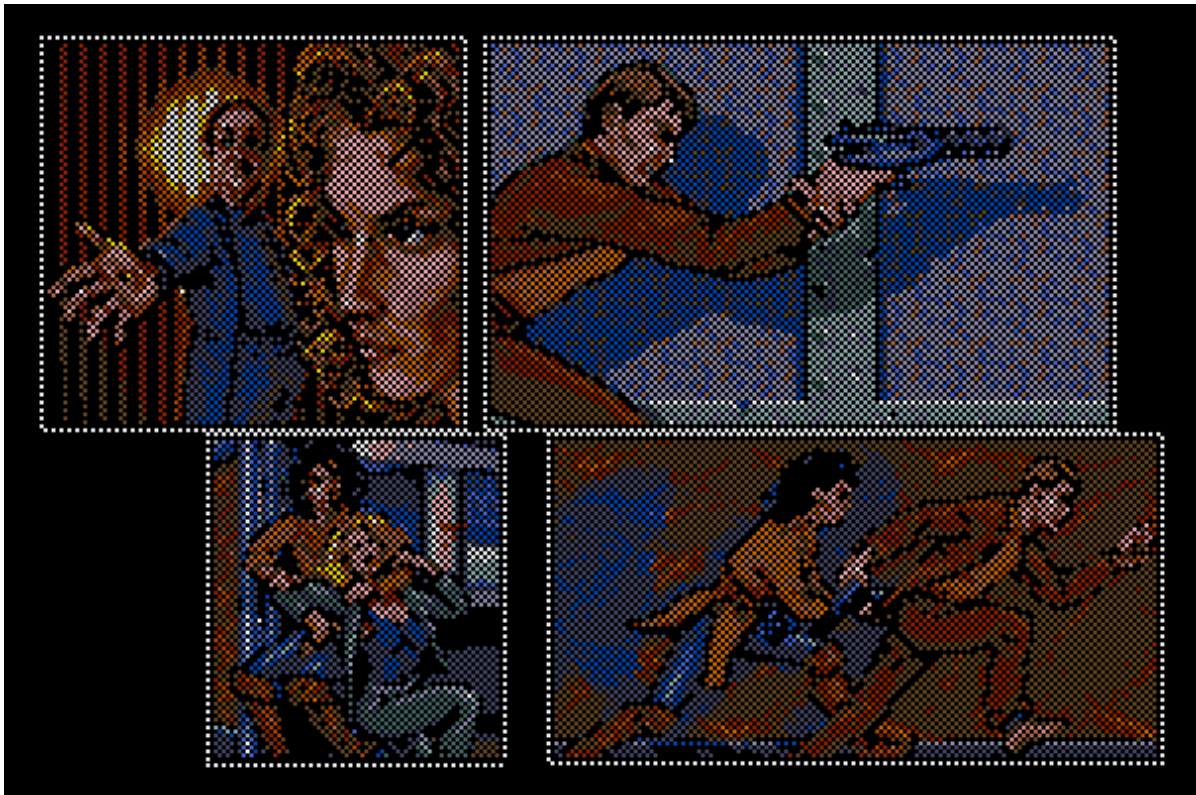
An option was appended to deploy multiple holograms of Quaid to be controlled simultaneously across several platforms to disorientate Cohaagan. These are activated via your watch - well technically the *spacebar* - and you get 5 to toy with, though the realisation of the concept wasn't quite as sophisticated as imagined, or implemented where expected.
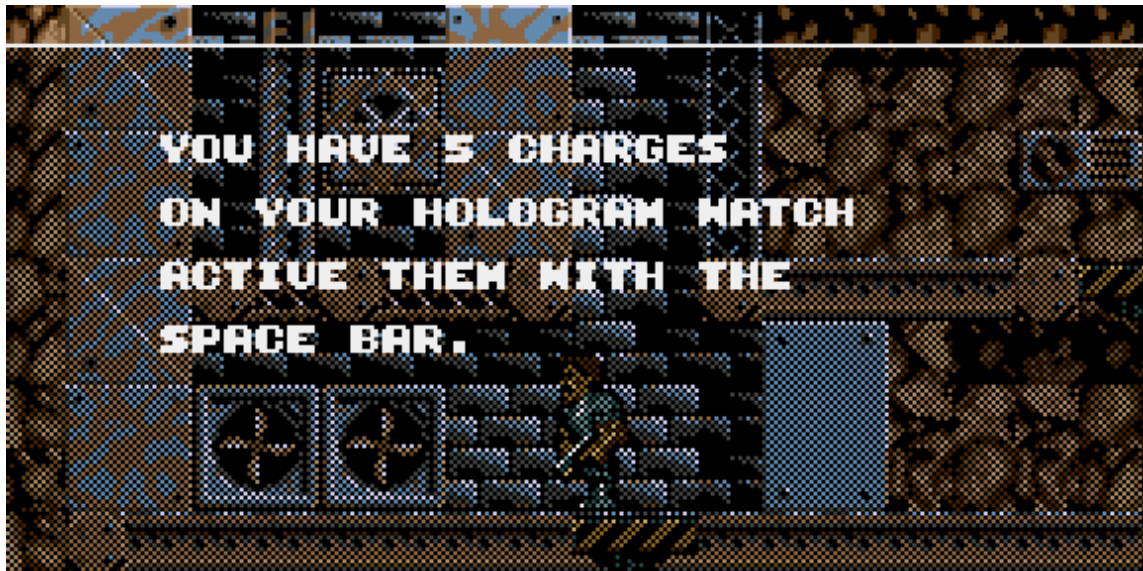
Despite Simon's proposals to flesh out and improve the game, many of his ambitious adaptations were never implemented due to time constraints, for example...

Inclusion of decision tree sub-games similar to those found in Dragon's Lair resulting in success or failure depending on the choices made.

Melina's movements were to be synchronized with Quaid's to allow them to cover each other's back without shooting one another.

There were to be pedestrians engaged in crossing the road during the driving sections, introducing an extra hazard to dodge and a time penalty for any collisions endured.

Obstacles such as rivers were to be built in, as were gravel and oil patches that would cause your car to spin around 180 degrees if driven through. Of these only the oil spills made it into the final game, and they slow your vehicle down rather than causing it to lose its grip on the road and whirl out of control.

Dissolving platforms and destructible walls would have lent extra nuance to the platforming elements, and enhanced the sense of discovery where the latter is concerned.

All these omissions left the finished article looking like an emaciated skeleton of a paint by numbers game. A basic run and gun platformer interspersed with watered-down driving portions.

In its defence, the sprite graphics, while not accurately portraying their real-life counterparts for licensing reasons, are well-drawn, convincingly animated (albeit possibly not incorporating Quaid's entire spectrum of 76 frames as intended), and teeming with earthy personality. Ironically, the title screen transition depicting Arnie's face is unmistakably him, and similarly of top-notch quality.


I queried this issue with Simon to discover why Schwarzenegger was so reticent to be pixelated for the

bedroom small screen. His answer surprised me, leading me to wonder if the 'two weeks' story wasn't the only myth to have emerged from the development of the Total Recall games...

> "I don't remember being told we couldn't make the sprite look like Arnie. I know that this would have been impossible at such a resolution."

Acoustically its *Mind* is emphatically, unequivocally *Active*. David Whittaker's spasmodic, otherworldly electronica soundtrack is exquisitely atmospheric, dovetailing impeccably with the sci-fi movie's core concepts. I'd go as far as recommending an eyes-closed, undivided-immersion listen, even if you skip the game entirely.

27 years on and we find ourselves in the uniquely bizarre position of actually being able to play the rolling demo of the Spectrum's first draft that was included on a Micro Hobby magazine cover tape. As sniffy as this article may sound, I *do* think it's remarkable that a 94% rated game (Crash issue 86, March 1991) was able to be salvaged from the ashes of this primitive work-in-progress presentation piece.
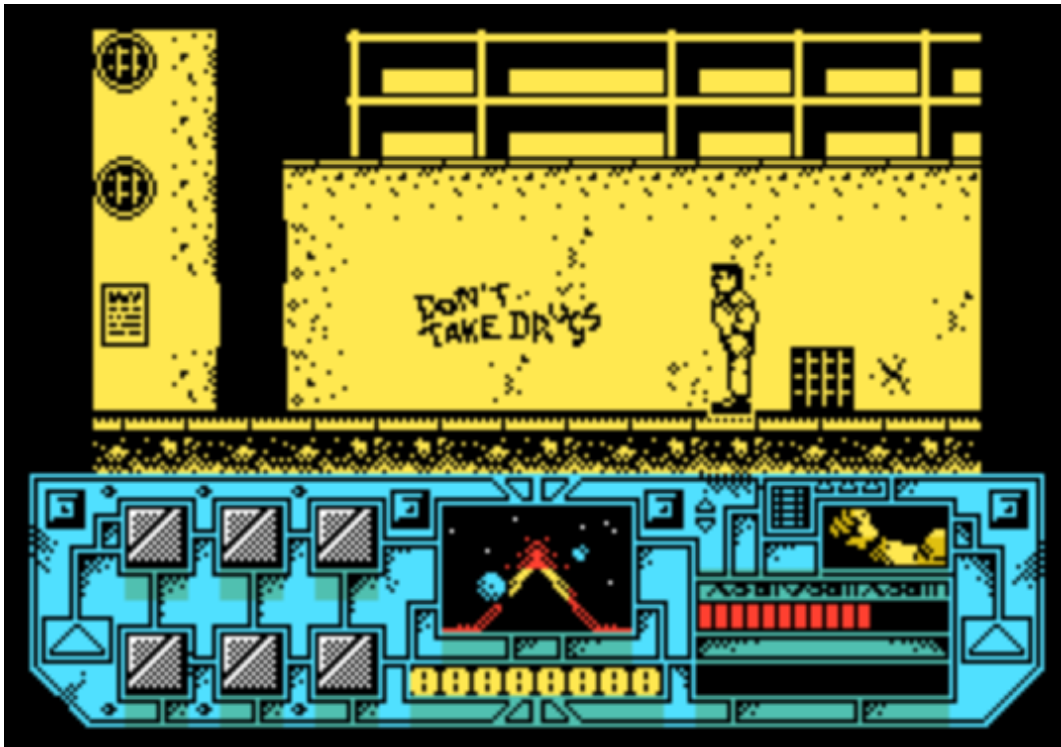
Some said the writing was on the wall for Active Minds from the start, others put it there later. ;)

Your eyes weren't deceiving you; Spanish magazine, Micro Hobby, really did review the scrolling demo of Total Recall, awarding it 75%. They even went so far as to discuss the efficacy of the control mechanics, which obviously they couldn't possibly have had the foggiest clue about.

"Now the computer game is on the streets, you too can become big Arnie as he battles through this multi-level Ocean extravaganza. The going's tough, and for many games I fell victim to Quaid's vicious adversaries. But the game's so playable, you're lucky I managed to tear myself away to write this comment! Presentation is as high as playability - my fave bit is the really neat title sequence. This is the second Ocean game I've played this month and the second I've awarded an accolade to. I think a big round of applause is called for! (clap clap clap!)" - **Mark, Crash**

"So, what can be said about Total Recall? Addictive isn't the word - though it's not a bad one to start with. So, it's very addictive. The platform levels are superbly playable, as long as you concentrate. I'm not so struck on the shoot-em-up levels, they're so risky, but at least you're provided with three lives on those levels. Should you die on level three, four or five, there's a Continue option after the Game Over message, which is very helpful.

The graphics for the first three levels are something special: bold, bright, detailed and - hurrah! - colourful! The animation's great too: Quaid/Hauser has real power in his stride and when he hits a henchman, with either fist or bullet, the henchmen flies backwards, stumbling from the blow.

I loved the game, and I have the sneaking suspicion you will too. Don't bother getting Rekall to remember it for you: go out and experience Total Recall for real!" - **Richard, Crash**

On the Amiga side of the equation, what you see is what there is, and all there ever *was*. It was appraised - or shall we say derided? - with broadly humdrum review scores by the dead-wood magazines of the time, and this was reflected in Total Recall's underwhelming performance in the Gallup charts. The perpetual Amiga offering entered C&VG's platform-centric top 20 at no. 15 in March 1991, and had sunk without a trace by the following month.

"A platform epic that's, sadly, not totally there"

77% - CU Amiga, November 1990

"You can't help feeling that more should have been made of a license like this: so many elements from the film - the video briefcase, the Rekall memory implant, the scene where Arnie is gasping for air - could have made it something more original. When you accept the game for what it is and not what it could have been, it's not half bad: there is enough action to last some time if you become hooked. However, with so many better platform

and race games around, it's doubtful you will recall it in a year's time."

70% - The One, February 1991

"Okay, perhaps it isn't that bad, but it's the sort of game you've seen before, and were probably hoping you wouldn't ever have to see again. Quite nice graphics, though."

41% - Amiga Power, October 1992

"After Ocean's poor show over the last year Total Recall wasn't on the top of my list for games I was looking forward to I must confess. However, it is in fact quite good. The actual main sprite, Quaid that is, looks a bit dodgy at first but once you get into it the game is quite addictive. The graphics and sound are good, even if the Arnie sprite is a midget with a moustache. This is certainly a step up the ladder for Ocean, and let's hope things carry on that way. But in the meantime, give Total Recall a try."

78% - Amiga Action, March 1991

"A mix of puzzle and platform it is high-paced, if a tad formulaic. A solid, polished package, only its late arrival, due to slipping in schedules, deprived it of a full review."

77% - Amiga Format, March 1991

In April, the redacted C64 translation put in an appearance in the agnostic 'all formats' chart at 16th position, and 17th place in the dedicated C64 league.

"Even the graphics come from Mars. The programmers have opted for a cartoon style which works extremely

well. It's colourful, chunky and smoothly animated. Gameplay too is well above average. The icing on the cake (or is that Mars bar?) is an excellent soundtrack. It's disjointed in places but the sounds are rich and atmospheric. The only niggle is that levels one and four, like levels two and three, are a bit too similar to each other. Total Recall doesn't have classic qualities, but does the business."

77% - Commodore Format, March 1991

"The best thriller of 1990 has finally smashed its way onto home computers, but it was a long and gory fight with Ocean taking the game off Active Minds to finish it in-house. The game is now credited to Mentus Absentia!

Clearly Total isn't a superslick production in the Navy SEALs league, which shows up most clearly in the

unremarkable mix of combat, exploration and platforms-and-ladders action but it's still addictive to play.

Similarly, the overhead-view cab scenes offer very little that's new, but add some much-needed variety. While Total Recall is a disappointment by comparison with the movie, it's remarkably good for a rewrite and is likely to provide a good challenge for Arnie fans and mappers."

"Familiar gameplay, but playable and well-executed."

76% - Zzap!, March 1991
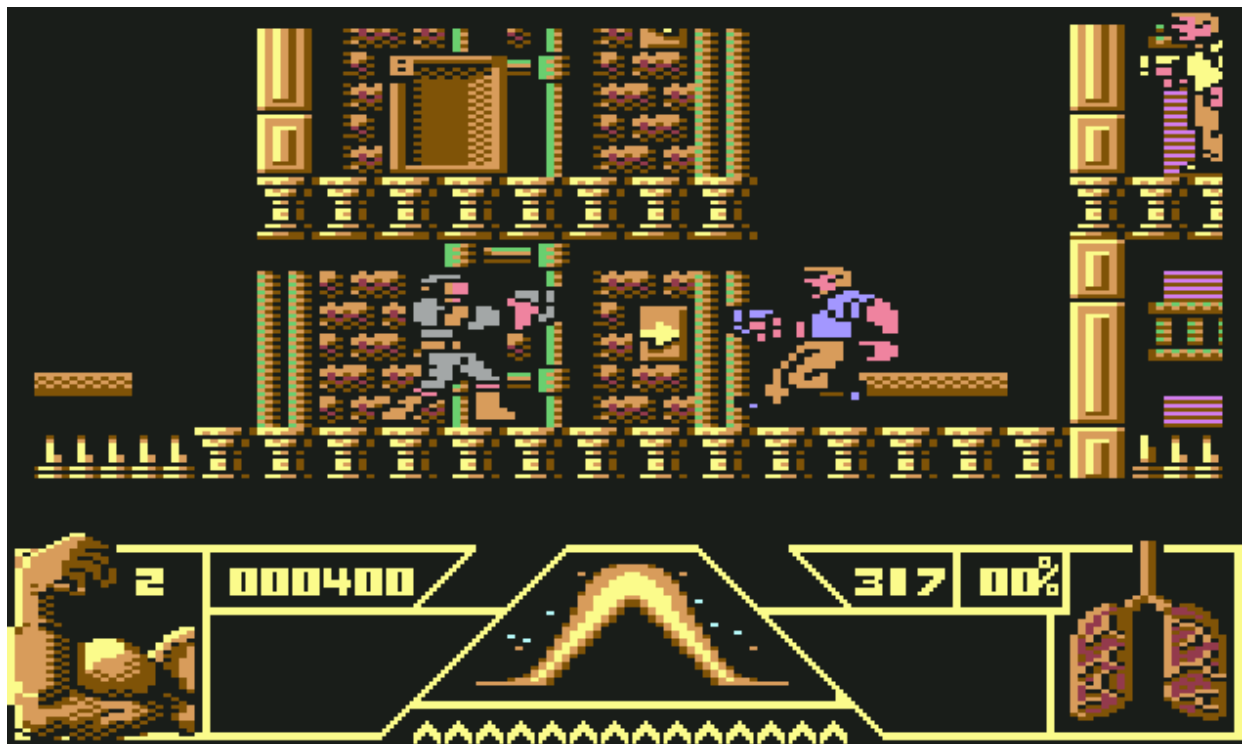
"So Total Recall is a decent budget buy. There's plenty to see and do, and it'll keep you going for ages (cos it's not that easy, you see). So if you want a big license, go and buy this 'un - for a change it's worth it."

90% - Commodore Format, September 1992

By June when all hope seemed lost for the Amstrad revamp, it sneaked into C&VG's platform-devoted tally in the last of their 20 slots.

Oddly enough, the Speccy overhaul that was so theatrically hoisted aloft in Crash magazine - whilst elsewhere its 16-bit grown-up brother was pushed around the plate like an overcooked sprout you'd rather not foist upon your delicate

digestive system - never had its moniker illuminated in neon lights in C&VG along with the other conversions of Total Recall. It *did* nevertheless feature in the inaugural edition of Crash's Speccy sales chart, first compiled in conjunction with software distributor Centersoft in April 1991. Total Recall took the no. 6 spot in the top 10 rundown, and was no more than a distant memory a month later.

James Leach of Your Sinclair magazine fills us in on the ZX Spectrum entry in the Total Recall quintuple...

"So what's it like? Well, not at all bad actually! The car bits are a pretty standard, but the platform sequences are very tricky and playable. They've got the difficulty level pitched just right - instead of having numerous lives you're only given one per level, and all those are up against the clock! The graphics are spanky too - they've got a really nice blocky and bouncy feel to them. (For example, when you die you explode in a kind of splat of gory goo. Eurgh!)

But there is a problem. (In fact, some of the more observant Trainspotters among you might have picked up on it already.) You see, Total Recall is not the game it was supposed to be! (Eh? Reader's voice) Perhaps I'd better explain...

Anyone who read Matt's Megapreview in the November ish will realise that, though the original Speccy version was very similar (same types of level and gameplay), this is a much scaled-down and simpler game than we were led to expect. (And Lord knows we've waited long enough! The first ads for this appeared in the October ish, over 6 months ago!) We're not too sure what went wrong, but we do know it was given to a different programmer at the very last minute and he had to churn it out in three weeks! It's a shame because with a few

more bits and bobs the game would've had a good stab at getting a Megagame - as it stands it's all a bit thin on the ground. (Like a B-movie game with an A-movie license really - if you see what l mean.)
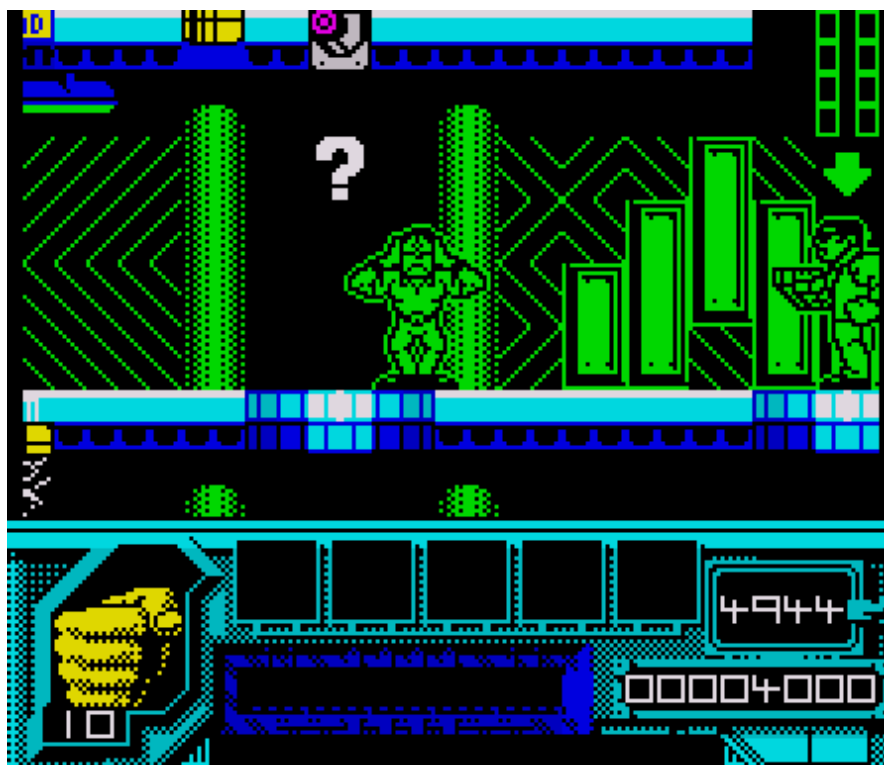
Still, although Total Recall won't knock your socks off, it is fast and addictive, and Ocean should at least be congratulated for releasing a more-than-competent game when they were up against such very hefty odds. (And well done to you, Mr Schwarzenegger, sir, your highness - er, please don't point that thing at me...)."

84% - Your Sinclair, March 1991
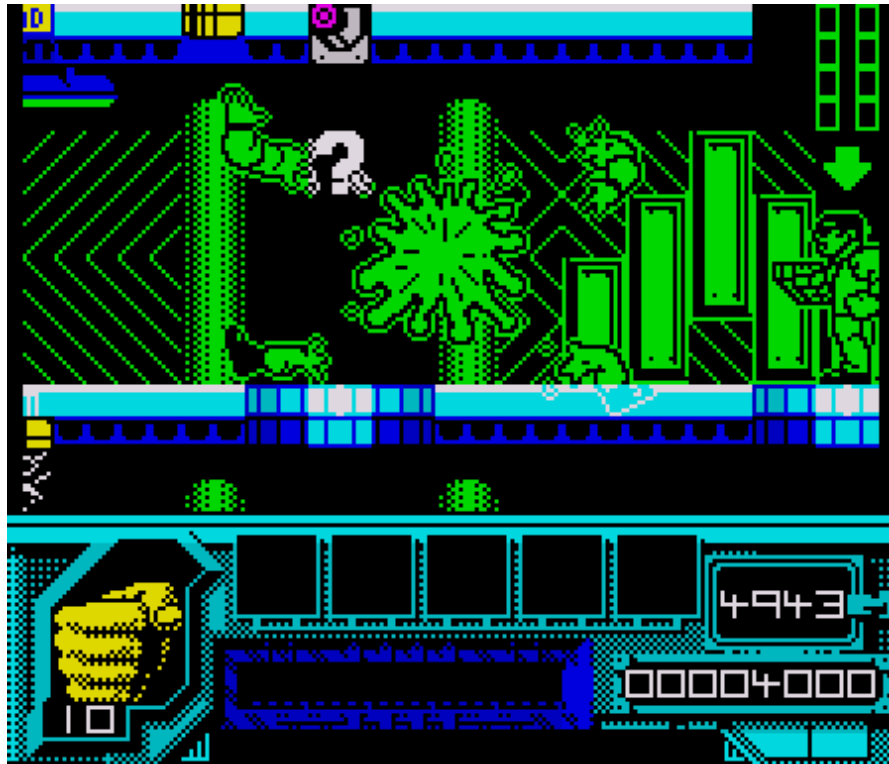
Despite the inevitable stress encumbered by rewriting an entire game in record-breaking time, the development team were able to maintain a sense a humour, which goes a long way towards explaining why Ocean are still so fondly remembered to this day.

One person in particular who would have been nervously awaiting the media reception given the game's troubled genesis is Ocean's former software development director, Gary Bracey. Failing to ascertain his opinion on this regrettable entry in his formidable portfolio would have put Cohaagan's oxygen-hogging transgressions in the shade! Cans of worms aside, I had to ask.

"This is one of those events I do have a very sketchy recollection about. Around the time of Total Recall I was very involved with setting up Ocean of America, sourcing film licenses generally and overseeing the development of around 12 games (across multiple formats) so you can

understand why the significance of this title has faded a lot for me.

I remember Dave Colley from Active Minds completely bulls**tting us about the progress of the game, to the extent we had to completely pull the rug and assign an in-house team to rescue the project in what, I think, was an inconceivably short amount of time.

The irony, I think, is that at the time it was considered to be a potentially 'huge' title due to the then-starpower of Arnie and so there were expectations of RoboCop-size numbers. However, although the film itself performed pretty well at the box-office it wasn't the blockbuster we expected so ...double disappointment!"

It does make you wonder what exactly would have been handed over when d-day rolled around, and what the explanation might have been, had the plug not have been

pulled when it was. It's a fairly safe bet that the 8-bit interpretations at least would never have come to fruition.

Capitalising on licensed source material in the gaming industry is all about precision timing; fail to shoehorn your product onto the shelves while the theme is the current hot topic and the target audience is being swept along in the ready-made maelstrom of media hyperbole, and you miss your window of opportunity to maximise return on your investment. With a hefty initial outlay - as was often demanded to secure a blockbuster movie license - you wouldn't merely risk under-performing, you could actually make a considerable loss. By the same token, if the gap between buoyant movie zeitgeist and game release date drifted *too* far apart, development studios would have to seriously consider canning the project entirely.

When all's said and done, neutering the looming vapourware calamity in the nick of time, switching it with a hastily thrown together sticky plaster likely did Ocean more good than harm. What alternative did they have, really? Make a grovelling apology to the magazines explaining that there would be no Total Recall game after all, despite several months of anticipation and the proliferation of numerous preview interviews and articles? They'd never have lived it down. A Total Recall no-show incident would have put internet memes on the map long before the internet as we know it... or perhaps I'm blowing it out of all proportion, and need to take a step back and look at the wider picture. Gary certainly wouldn't argue with that sentiment.

> "With regard to license costs and sales, I genuinely have no idea. It really wasn't as significant a landmark in Ocean's history as you are being led to believe. Remember that we also put our 'premier' titles in the hands of the in-house teams and outsourced the

secondary ones, which Total Recall obviously was. Active Minds were pretty useless but it wasn't the first time a developer had tried to pull the wool over our eyes (Knight Rider being the most infamous example).

I guess it just irks me that we had dozens (hundreds?) of successfully-developed games and less than a handful were disastrous so I don't know why such a big thing is made of it."

'Disastrous' is perhaps the keyword; it's a genre in itself in the movie industry so people are bound to be equally enthralled when circumstances conspire against games developers. For jealous rivals in particular, that curiosity doesn't need much encouragement to descend into schadenfreude. Crazy stories hit the headlines, and crazy headlines sell newspapers ...and the stories *under* those headlines are covered on retro gaming blogs years after the furore should long since have abated! So here we are. There's

no denying that were Total Recall a resident of Gotham City it would have a tight, white coat and cell in Arkham Asylum all to itself!

In my defence personally, I've spent far longer waxing lyrical about Ocean titles that are amongst my all-time favourites: Addams Family, Parasol Stars, Wizkid, Toki, New Zealand Story, Pang, Midnight Resistance, Liquid Kids, Snow Bros, RoboCop and Rainbow Islands to name a small selection. I suppose that's the difference between a true Ocean fan and a hack who only crawls out of the woodwork to pick over the bones of the entertainment flops, before switching back to writing about 10 former mega-celebs who have since 'let themselves go'.

Quite possibly Total Recall's doomed fate was sealed from its red dawn, without a hope on Mars of joining the latter in Ocean's pantheon of gaming immortals. Upon refreshing Simon's memory of the generic blueprint document and his own redraft, he was aghast that sewing it up on time was once thought feasible, given the ludicrously ambitious scope of the project. Ever the diplomat, his exact words were, "well that's a f**king mess, dear god that would take forever". Regardless of the developers' expertise or motivation then, it's entirely plausible that Ocean's Martian movie license tree may never have borne the promised fruit.

Nevertheless, returning to that inauspicious word, 'disastrous', Total Recall was only such if the goal was to have thousands of copies on the retailer's shelves by Christmas, and in the no. 1 chart slot when the sales figures came out in the wash a month or two later. In *that* respect, it clearly missed the Johnnycab, yet by anyone else's standards, it was by no means the game to incite black holes to frondesce and swallow up the industry. As we've seen to the contrary, the Total Recall rewrite received some extremely positive review scores, and even the Amiga and Atari ST movie translations that *survived* the chop are hardly E.T.-awful, despite its less than illustrious AI.

With the last of the terrorists' remains rotting in a long-forgotten lift shaft, or mingling with the swirling Mars

sandstorms, all that separates the hullabaloo from the reality nearly three decades on is a lot of hot carbon dioxide. That, and a dissertation on the game that *was*, *wasn't* and *might* have been, that's - believe it or not - far longer than the 17-page novel on which Arnie's movie was based. All I can do is apologise to those of you who have made it this far.

Perhaps one day the ultimate Total Recall collector's edition computer game based on the original brief will materialise from the most unlikely provenance. Until then we can accede consolation in the knowledge that we'll always have Paul Verhoeven's timeless classic movie, and undergo a Russian roulette medical procedure to excise all knowledge of the 2012 Colin Farrell remake.

We can forget it for you wholesale!